

## Collaborative Teams

Collaboration among all educators is critical to the RTI process. “All educators for all students” means that all educators, each and every one of us, are accountable for the educational outcomes of each and every student. The educational system of the past was compartmentalized due largely to funding streams that earmarked monies for meeting the needs of specific populations of students. For example, special education services for students with disabilities and Title 1 tutoring services for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Over time, a culture of “this is my kid- that is your kid” developed because specific personnel provided educational supports for specific students in these programs. For example, the special education “Resource” teacher only provides intervention and support to students on IEPs or the school psychologist can only work with students being evaluated for special education eligibility or those receiving special education services. In the RTI process, collaborative teams are formed using the resource, talent and personnel across the educational system.

One of the finest outcomes thus far for the educators who have been a part of the Montana RTI Pilot Project is a renewed and deeper understanding and appreciation for each other. The time and space created by the building leaders for educators to meet to have discussions about the RTI process, grade level issues, assessment processes, data, and about individual students offers the opportunity for a broadened perspective and insight into what works best for students and for them as well. The collaboration across educators, specialists, and administrators provides the kind of support and teamwork that creates a positive and meaningful working climate. As you and your staff plan for RTI Implementation, you may want to evaluate the extent of collaboration among staff in your school. Appendix A provides a RTI Collaboration Survey that can be used by administrators to gain an understanding of the extent of collaboration and to identify areas in need of professional development or clarification before beginning the RTI process. This survey is being used in the Montana RTI Pilot Project as a way to evaluate changes in collaboration as the RTI process has been implemented.

In the implementation of the RTI process and the Montana 3 Tier Model of Instruction, a school that supports one or more collaborative team(s) is more likely to meet the needs of struggling learners. Teams should be established based on the learning needs of students and availability of staff members. The principal (instructional leader) must structure regular meeting times during regular school hours and supply substitutes for personnel on the RTI Team(s). The collaborative team approach is supported by research and has been found to be most effective when the team addresses both prevention *and* intervention of academic and social/behavioral difficulties.

Successes include the following:

- A high rate of student achievement
- Increased capacity of teachers to meet specific needs of struggling students
- Decreased number of special education referrals and placements

### What Collaborative Teams Do

In establishing collaborative teams, schools need to plan, organize, develop procedural guidelines, continue to evaluate effectiveness, and make adjustments as needed. Effective teams use a problem-solving process as defined previously in this manual and includes tasks such as:

- **Defining the “problem”**  
What is the difference between current performance and expectation for minimum proficiency? Is a significant difference that needs intervention?
- **Analyzing why it is occurring**  
Is it a “can’t do” skill, a “won’t do skill”, or a fluency issue? Collect and analyze data about Instruction, Curriculum, Environment, and Learner (ICEL). Use student Records, Interviews, Observations, and Testing (RIOT) to assess.
- **Developing and implementing an intervention action plan**  
Link assessment to intervention; target the skill(s) in need of intervention. Set appropriate and ambitious learning goals. Plan includes what intervention(s), the duration and intensity, the instructor(s), which progress monitoring instruments, how often progress monitoring should occur, what intervention fidelity measure, how often, and who will administer fidelity measure? Plan how to keep parents informed and involved.
- **Monitor student progress and intervention fidelity**  
Coordinate systematic and frequent student progress monitoring and intervention fidelity data collection. Accumulate data, graph, and report to Team, student, and parents.
- **Evaluate intervention plan effectiveness**  
Was intervention implemented with fidelity? If so, what does the accumulated progress monitoring data indicate about learning rate and grade-level expectation? If the intervention was not implemented with fidelity, why? Does more training on intervention implementation need to take place, or more consideration on the feasibility of the intervention? Cannot attribute student non-progress to intervention unless the plan was implemented with fidelity.
- **Data-based decisions about intervention**  
Make decision about whether to: (a) continue intervention (if progress is being made towards making the set goal), (b) adjust intervention; if little or not progress is being, decide to increase dosage (more time), change intervention, etc.; and (c) exit student if goal has been met and student is maintaining learning rate and at or above minimum grade level proficiency.

Team members should be knowledgeable about and capable of using the skills listed below:

- Group processing
- Effective classroom organization and management
- Problem-solving and collaboration
- Data collection/evaluation
- Instructional adaptations and interventions

In addition, team members should have knowledge and training in the following:

- The Montana State Standards
- Critical components of reading, math, written expression instruction
- Culturally sensitive instructional issues
- Evidence-based instructional materials and practices

- Types of assessments and appropriate use
- Availability of school and community resources

Finally, RTI Teams utilize their time in meetings effectively and efficiently by appointment team members to perform different roles that facilitate meetings. These roles are:

- Meeting Facilitator (directs team through the meeting)
- Case manager (makes sure all stakeholders are invited and present; coordinates implementation of team decisions.)
- Scribe (takes notes and completes the RTI Intervention Plan document)
- Timekeeper (redirects team to immediate focus of meeting; keeps and calls “time” for various meeting components in problem solving)

In general, a problem solving Student RTI Team should spend no more than 20-25 minutes per student case. Given the data and other information available to the team prior to reviewing the case, the time allotment is reasonable, thus making the use of staff time both effective and efficient.

In the Montana RTI process, local schools make decisions about the composition of and number of collaborative problem solving teams that will best meet the needs of students, staff, the local culture, resources, and needs. At the very least, a school should have at least two teams: (a) RTI Steering Team and (b) the Student RTI Team.

### **RTI Steering Team**

The RTI Steering Team is comprised of:

- school principal
- 2 general education teachers
- special education teacher and/or director
- school psychologist
- school counselor
- parent (recommended).

The purpose of the RTI Steering Team is to plan for the implementation of the RTI process, set the school agenda for instructional periods, all assessment, RTI team meetings, ongoing staff professional training and development, and to review school-level data to make decisions about ongoing instruction effectiveness. The RTI Steering Team also monitors the fidelity of the RTI process implementation to ensure the process is successfully implemented and maintained using the essential components needed for the integrity of the process.

The RTI Steering Team may also serve as a liaison between the school and the local community and agencies. It is highly suggested, and is especially effective in small rural communities, that the community is made aware of how school leaders are structuring the school learning environment. The achievement made by students and staff should be actively “advertised” to community service clubs, agencies, and citizens via meetings, local newspapers, etc. Community leaders and private citizens may be interested in volunteering for activities as well.

## Student RTI Team

Schools may already have at least one pre-referral team that consistently meets to review student referral cases for the purpose of advising teachers on further intervention. This may be called the Child Study Team (CST), the Student Assistance Team (SAT), or another term. If the school already has a pre-referral team in place, the team can be trained on the RTI process and problem solving methods and serve as the Student RTI Team.

In very small schools, the RTI Steering Team may also be the Student RTI Team. In larger schools with multiple classes at each grade level, schools may decide to have several Student RTI Teams, based upon grade level. For example, there could be a K-2 Student RTI Team and a Gr 3-6 Student RTI Team. At least one member of grade level teams should be from the RTI Steering Team, however.

Table 4 below lists different configurations of collaborative teams and their purpose that are widely used in other states, by schools and/or districts. These examples are provided to facilitate thought about what might best fit your school's needs, resources, and culture.

**Table 4. Examples of School Collaborative Teams**

<i>Team</i>	<i>Recommended Members</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
<b>Grade Level Team</b> (e.g. all 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade teachers OR a Gr K-2 team)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All grade level teachers</li> <li>• Subject specialist and/or coach (reading, math, etc)</li> <li>• ELL teacher, if applicable</li> <li>• Speech/language pathologist</li> <li>• School psychologist</li> <li>• Administrators as appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure consistency of effective instructional practices within and across grade levels.</li> <li>• Share responsibility for student achievement, using student data as a base for instructional decision-making.</li> <li>• Act as a problem-solving organization that assists each other in meeting the literacy needs of students</li> </ul>
<b>Content Area Department Team (Secondary schools)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department head</li> <li>• Content area teachers</li> <li>• Administrators as appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure consistency of instructional practices within the content area</li> <li>• Share responsibility for student achievement, using student data as a basis for instructional decisions</li> <li>• Act as a problem-solving organization that assists each other in meeting the academic needs of students</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy/Math/Science</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designated classroom teachers</li> <li>• Specialist and/or coach of subject area (e.g. Math)</li> <li>• Special educator, speech-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide assistance to teachers whose students are not reaching Tier I benchmarks by developing an instructional plan based on student's record of assessment, performance data, and teacher input.</li> </ul>

<p><b>(Subject area)</b></p> <p><b>Team</b></p>	<p>language specialist, as appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrators as appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide assistance to teachers whose students are not reaching Tier 2 targets by developing an instructional plan based on student’s record of assessment, performance data, and teacher input.</li> <li>• Provide assistance to teachers whose students are not reaching Tier 3 targets by developing an instructional plan based on student’s record of assessment, performance data, and teacher input.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Instructional Support Team (IST)</b></p> <p><i>(There are numerous other names attached to this body, such as student assistant team, TAT, at risk team, and student support team. It is usually a school-based decision as to what name is given the team.)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designated classroom teachers</li> <li>• Special education teacher</li> <li>• School Psychologist</li> <li>• Administrators as appropriate</li> <li>• Other specialists as needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist teachers in their efforts to help the students who struggle in their classrooms, including those in special education.</li> <li>• Consider all educational areas that can impact or interfere with student achievement and school success, including academics, behavior, and health.</li> <li>• Prevent school failure by looking at the whole child, realizing that oftentimes more than one issue is involved when a student is struggling.</li> </ul>
<p><b>IEP Team</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special educator</li> <li>• Individual who can interpret and critically analyze assessments and intervention data</li> <li>• Administrators as appropriate</li> <li>• Parent</li> <li>• Classroom teacher</li> <li>• Student, when appropriate</li> <li>• Other teachers, specialists, representatives, as needed</li> </ul>	<p><b>Initial:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine a student’s eligibility for special education</li> <li>• Design an Individual Education Plan (IEP), which sets educational goals for the student and gives details about the educational supports and services that will help the child with a disability receive valuable instruction in special education</li> </ul> <p><b>Annual review:</b> Revise the student’s IEP as needed.  <b>Re-evaluation:</b> Determine if student is still eligible for services.</p>

<p><b>Data Team</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrators as appropriate</li> <li>• Teacher representatives</li> <li>• Teacher specialists as appropriate (e.g., speech, school psychologist, Title I, literacy coach, ELL teacher)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster student learning by reviewing student data to make informed decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assemble and examine data.</li> <li>- Identify specific concerns from school test reports &amp; subgroup data.</li> <li>- Interpret school data to determine appropriate/ambitious goals.</li> <li>- Determine appropriate intervention to reach goals.</li> <li>- Determine what data will be used to monitor progress and document success in reaching goals.</li> <li>- Identify data patterns.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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Schools can organize and reorganize teams during the implementation of the RTI process because this is a dynamic process in which procedural changes, especially in teams, are made to meet the ongoing changes in need and resources of a school. The key to teaming in the RTI process is leadership, collaboration across educators and the use of the problem solving process to drive decisions. How teams are configured, when they meet, responsibilities of team members, and so on are all local decisions that are made through collaborative discussions.